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ABSTRACT

During the school year of 1972-73 a large Northern urban school district requested that a feasibility study for a community policy board to govern a junior high school be conducted. A committee was appointed to conduct the study. A part of the committee's task was to sample the opinion of students, parents, and teachers regarding: what should be taught in the school; and how much parent involvement in school matter seemed desirable. The inquiry included the school under consideration for community control plus three other schools not involved in the feasibility study. A questionnaire was administered to a representative sample of students, parents, and teachers at the four schools. The study provides strong evidence suggesting that black students and parents desire a school curriculum that includes the teaching of basic skills: reading, writing, spelling, speech, mathematics, and the basic social sciences. It seems clear from this study that parental involvement in school matters is less desirable for those who have never witnessed full parental involvement than for those who have experienced it. Overall, black parents have expressed a strong desire for parental participation in school matters. Black students seem to be somewhat less concerned about parental involvement. Teachers are mildly receptive to the idea. (Author/JM)

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What Should Constitute the Curriculum of Black Schools and How Much Parent Participation?

by

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After decades of fighting for racially integrated public education, out of frustration, Blacks are now looking for alternative strategies for improving educational opportunities for their children. Blacks are beginning to question whether or not the concept of racially integrated education, alone, is a viable mean of improving education for their children. The wisdom of that position will not be discussed nor will there be an extensive review of the literature on the subject. Alternative strategies mentioned most often are: improved curricula matters and offerings; and parent participation in school matters. These foci will be the subject of this presentation.

Background

During the school year of 1972-73 a large Northern urban school district requested that a feasibility study for a community policy board to govern a junior high school be conducted. A committee was appointed to conduct the study. A part of the Committee's task was to sample the opinion of students, parents, and teachers regarding: what should be taught in the school; and how much parent involvement in school matter seemed desirable. The inquiry included the school under consideration for community control (community policy board) plus three other schools not involved in the feasibility study. However, one of the three schools not involved in the study is already a community controlled school.

Schools

School A. This school is not being considered for a community policy board, however, it is adjacent to School D that is under community control. The student population is all Black. The principal is White and the teaching staff is 85 percent White. It is considered a typical junior high school, grades 7-9. The community is in the lower social-economic status (SES).

School B. School B is a junior high school, grades 7-9. The student population is all Black. School B is being considered for community control. The school's principal is Black, however, the teaching staff is almost 90 percent White. The administration, teachers, students and parents are aware of the study and frequently express their agreement or disagreement with the concept of community control. The community is in the lower social-economic status.

School C. School C is similar to School A and B except that it is not adjacent to another community controlled school, nor is it being considered for community control.

School D. School D is an elementary school, grades K-6, thus different from school's A, B, and C. Only students in grades 6 responded to our inquiry. The school is a community controlled one, for 5 years. The principal is Black; and the teaching staff is about 50 percent Black. The student body is all Black. The central board of education considers the community policy board a success.

The Study

A questionnaire (see appendix) was administered to a representative sample of students, parents, and teachers at the four schools. Results were tabulated and submitted to the central board of education as a part of the feasibility study's report.

Respondents were asked to rank statements on school matters. The questionnaire made use of a likert type scale, ranging from 0 to 7. A zero (0) would indicate that an item was not very important, while a seven (7) would indicate that it is considered very important.

Categories used to aid in the interpretation of the findings are:

(1) Score 0-5.0, average importance or less

(2) Score 5.1-7.0, better than average in importance.

Findings

Curricula Matters[1]

Table 2 suggests that when you consider the combined opinions of students, parents, and teachers for each school there is general agreement that: reading, writing, spelling, mathematics, science, speech, history, and physical education are very important. While geography, civics, and home economics received average marks. Woodshop, auto mechanics, typing, art, and music received less than average or poor marks.

Table 2 also revealed that the combined mean scores for students, parents, and teachers differed significantly on certain curricula matters. The importance of reading, speech, and writing is ranked lower by students, than by parents or teachers. Subject matter areas other than mathematics,

Table 1
Curriculum Offerings Rating: Mean Scores
N = 240
(S, Student; P, Parent; T, Teacher)

Item	School A			School B			School C			School D		
	S	P	T	S	P	T	S	P	T	S	P	T
1. Reading**	6.1	6.0	6.3	4.6	7.0	6.8	5.6	6.7	6.9	6.9	6.6	7.0
2. Writing**	3.9	6.8	6.4	4.9	6.5	6.2	4.7	5.5	6.3	6.5	6.5	6.6
3. Spelling**	5.5	6.8	6.5	5.2	7.0	6.4	5.5	6.6	5.5	6.9	6.9	5.6
4. Math**	6.9	6.8	6.9	6.7	6.9	6.6	6.5	6.8	6.5	7.0	6.9	6.8
5. Science**	6.3	5.5	6.2	6.0	6.2	6.1	6.0	5.8	5.4	6.1	5.7	6.0
6. Speech**	4.9	5.8	6.5	5.2	6.9	6.7	5.6	6.2	6.5	5.4	6.3	6.6
7. History**	6.6	5.6	5.1	5.7	6.5	5.4	5.4	5.8	5.0	6.1	5.6	5.2
8. Geography**	5.9	5.5	5.4	5.1	6.1	5.0	5.5	6.0	4.8	6.4	5.6	5.0
9. Civics	4.4	5.1	5.2	4.7	5.6	5.1	5.9	6.2	4.8	6.3	5.2	4.7
10. Woodshop*	4.9	4.9	4.1	3.8	5.2	5.1	4.3	4.5	3.9	4.2	5.0	4.6
11. Auto Mechanics**	4.4	4.3	3.8	5.2	5.5	4.9	4.5	4.4	3.7	6.0	4.5	4.6
12. Home Economic**	4.7	5.9	5.3	5.3	6.3	5.2	5.5	5.3	4.5	6.4	5.8	4.6
13. Typing**	5.2	6.0	3.4	5.2	6.3	5.0	5.4	5.4	4.1	5.7	5.6	4.5
14. Physical Ed.**	6.2	5.7	5.7	6.3	5.8	5.8	5.8	5.4	4.8	6.7	5.2	5.6
15. Art**	4.3	5.4	4.2	4.1	5.0	5.4	3.9	4.6	4.0	4.6	4.6	5.2
16. Music**	4.6	5.3	4.2	3.7	5.2	5.2	3.7	4.9	3.9	5.6	5.0	4.5

1. *Significant difference between schools ($P > .05$).
2. **Significant difference between roles ($P > .05$).
3. Significant interaction ($P > .05$) exist between school and role for items Number 1, 2, 3, 9, 12, and 16.

Table 2

Curricula Offerings Rating: Combined Mean Scores by School and Role

Item	School				Role		
	A	B	C	D	Students	Parents	Teachers
1. Reading	6.1	6.1	6.4	6.8	5.8	6.6	6.8
2. Writing	5.7	5.9	5.5	6.5	5.0	6.3	6.4
3. Spelling	6.2	6.2	5.9	6.5	5.8	6.8	6.0
4. Math	6.9	6.9	6.6	6.9	6.8	6.8	6.7
5. Science	6.0	6.1	5.7	5.9	6.1	5.8	5.9
6. Speech	5.7	6.2	6.1	6.1	5.3	6.3	6.6
7. History	5.8	5.8	5.4	5.6	5.9	5.8	5.2
8. Geography	5.6	5.4	5.4	5.7	5.7	5.9	5.0
9. Civics	4.9	5.1	5.6	5.4	5.3	5.5	4.9
10. Woodshop	4.6	4.7	4.2	4.6	4.3	4.9	4.4
11. Auto Mechanics	4.2	5.2	4.2	5.0	5.0	4.6	4.2
12. Home Economics	5.3	5.6	5.1	5.6	5.4	5.8	4.9
13. Typing	4.9	5.5	4.9	5.3	5.4	5.8	4.2
14. Physical Ed.	5.9	6.0	5.3	5.8	6.3	5.5	5.5
15. Art	4.6	4.8	4.2	4.8	4.2	4.9	4.7
16. Music	4.7	4.7	4.1	5.0	4.4	5.1	4.4

science, and the language arts are ranked lower by teachers than by either students or parents. Parents tend to give home economics and typing a higher rating than students or teachers. While students tend to give physical education a higher rating than parents or teachers. It was a surprise however to find art and music in the same category with woodshop.

Table 1 revealed little difference in opinions among parents and teachers regarding different subject matter areas. History and geography were exceptions. Parents tend to give history and geography a higher rating than teachers or students.

With the exception of School D (community controlled), students, in general, tend to give reading, writing, spelling, and speech a much lower score than parents or teachers. On the other hand, students tended to give physical education a much higher rating than parents or teachers. Only in School D are students, parents, and teachers in general agreement on the importance of specific curricula areas.

Parent Participation[2]

Table 2 revealed that when opinions are grouped together by school (students, parents, and teachers combined) combined mean scores for School D are significantly different from the others. This suggests that School D is much more positive toward parent participation. Also, School B which is being considered for implementing a community policy board is much more positive toward parent participation than School A or C. In general, high marks for parental involvement are given for: school activities, curricula matters, approval of one's child program of study, approval of changes in a students program information about student behavior, support for teachers, and observation of classroom teaching. The other areas received average to low ratings. Evaluation of teachers receiving the lowest rating. Again, however, School D was the exception.

Data on combined mean scores by role (student, parent, and teacher) reveal that students gave high marks to parental involvement in: (1) school activities, approval of a student's program of study, right of parents to approve changes in student programs, information for parents about student behavior, and parental involvement with student grievance procedures. Parents gave most items high ratings, except: selection of

the principal, approval of changes in a student's program of study, and tne evaluation of teachers. While evaluation of staff did not receive a high rating by parents, they considered it very important to be involved in evaluating the entire school as a teaching institution. Teachers also tended to give high ratings to most items, except: selection of the principal, approving student programs of study, evaluating teachers, and parental involvement with student grievances.

Students tend to disagree with parents slightly regarding parental involvement with students program of study. Students gave that item a higher rating than parents. While parents gave parental involvement a high rating, students give it the lowest with teachers in the middle. Students, parents, and teachers expressed a strong desire that parents should evaluate the school, neither felt however that parents should be involved in the process of evaluating individual staff members. Parents gave their lowest rating to parents getting involved in staff evaluation. Teachers also gave their lowest rating to parents getting involved in staff evaluation. While students gave their lowest ratings to parental involvement in setting school rules, support for teachers, and classroom observation.

Table 3, listing means scores of individual schools, again, reveal that School D, community controlled, has a much more positive attitude toward parental involvement. That attitude is reflected by students, parents, and teachers. For example, while students in School D gave classroom observation by parents a 6.8 rating, the other schools gave ratings of 1.7, 4.0, and 4.6. Students in School A which is located across the street from School D, community controlled, expressed the most negative feelings toward parental involvement. Teachers in Schools A, B, and C gave their lowest rating to staff evaluation and their highest to support for teachers. Interesting, students and parents in Schools A, B, and C also gave low ratings for parental involvement in staff evaluations.

Conclusions

Curriculum. There is strong evidence from this study to suggest that Black students, and parents desire a school curriculum that includes the teaching of basic skills: reading, writing, spelling, speech,

Table 3
Parent Participation: Mean Scores
N = 240
(S, Student; P, Parent; T, Teacher)

Item	School A			School B			School C			School D		
	S	P	T	S	P	T	S	P	T	S	P	T
1. School Activities**	5.2	6.0	6.2	5.5	6.2	6.2	4.9	5.3	5.7	5.1	6.6	6.2
2. Set School Rules**	2.9	5.8	6.1	4.1	5.6	4.6	3.7	4.8	4.7	4.0	6.7	6.5
3. Curriculum**	4.3	5.8	5.7	4.7	5.8	4.5	4.6	4.3	4.5	4.8	5.9	6.4
4. Select Principal*	3.1	5.0	5.5	5.2	4.6	2.3	3.8	3.5	2.8	4.3	5.6	6.7
5. Approve Child's Program of Study**	4.9	5.3	5.2	6.1	5.6	4.7	5.4	5.3	3.9	6.2	6.2	5.8
6. Approve Changes in Child's Prog.	4.5	5.6	5.6	5.2	4.4	5.8	5.5	4.7	3.7	5.8	4.9	5.7
7. Informed About Child's Behavior**	6.0	6.0	5.4	6.2	6.8	6.2	6.3	7.0	5.5	6.9	5.8	6.1
8. Evaluate Teachers**	3.4	4.9	3.5	4.6	5.2	2.2	4.7	3.6	2.3	5.7	5.2	6.2
9. Student Grievance**	4.5	5.5	4.1	4.9	5.6	4.4	4.9	3.6	3.0	6.4	5.9	5.3
10. Support Teachers**	2.5	6.4	5.1	4.6	6.7	6.2	4.1	5.9	6.4	5.8	5.8	5.8
11. Observe Teaching**	1.7	6.1	5.4	4.0	6.6	5.2	4.6	5.5	6.2	6.8	6.3	5.7
12. Evaluate School*	3.1	5.7	5.2	5.0	5.7	4.4	5.0	4.6	4.9	6.1	5.6	5.8
13. Assist in Classroom*	3.0	5.7	5.5	5.2	6.1	5.5	5.4	5.3	5.9	6.6	5.2	5.8

1. *Significant difference between schools, $P > .05$.
2. **Significant difference between roles, $p > .05$.
3. Significant interaction ($P > .05$) exist between school and role items Number 4, 6, 8, 10, 11, 12, and 13.

Table 4
Parent Participation: Combined Mean Scores
N = 240

	School				Role		
	A	B	C	D	Student	Parent	Teacher
1. School Activities	5.8	6.0	5.3	5.9	5.2	6.0	6.1
2. Set School Rules	4.9	4.8	4.4	5.7	3.7	5.7	5.4
3. Curriculum	5.2	5.0	4.4	5.7	4.6	5.4	5.3
4. Select Principal	4.5	4.0	3.4	5.5	4.1	4.7	4.3
5. Approve Child's Program of Study	5.1	5.4	4.8	6.1	5.6	5.6	4.9
6. Approve Changes in Child's Program	5.2	5.1	4.6	5.4	5.2	4.9	5.2
7. Informed About Child's Behavior	5.8	6.4	6.3	6.3	6.4	6.4	5.9
8. Evaluate Teachers	3.9	4.0	3.5	5.7	4.6	4.7	3.6
9. Student Grievance	4.7	5.0	3.8	5.8	5.1	5.1	4.2
10. Support Teachers	4.6	5.8	5.5	5.8	4.2	6.2	5.6
11. Observe Teaching	4.4	5.2	5.4	6.3	4.2	6.1	5.1
12. Evaluate School	4.6	5.0	4.8	5.8	4.8	5.4	5.7
13. Assist in Classroom	4.7	5.6	5.5	5.8	5.0	5.5	5.7

mathematics, and the basic social sciences. Vocational education received a low rating. Surprisingly, art and music also fell into that category. Teachers in Black schools also expressed agreement. This expression for the teaching of skills in the basic skills area may run counter to those who would offer Blacks vocational education as a core curriculum or "watered down" language arts or mathematics.

Students, parents, and teachers in School D were almost in complete agreement on the importance of subject matter areas. While the other schools evidenced some disparity in views between students, teachers, and parents. This seems to indicate that such a meshing of views on what should be taught should help a school accomplish its goals with greater ease. It seems fair to state that Black students, and parents desire a good basic education. An open school (with full parental involvement) tends to further internalize the goals of parents and teachers with those of students.

Parent Participation. It seems clear from this study that parental involvement in school matters is less desirable for those who have never witnessed full parental involvement than for those who experienced it. This is evident when you compare School D with Schools A, B, and C. Students, parents, and teachers who have experienced extensive parental involvement in school activities welcome the idea.

While students, parents, and teachers (except those in School D) expressed moderate or little desire to evaluate individual staff members they would like for parents to be involved in school activities and evaluate the total school program. This uneasiness (in some cases, fear) about parental involvement in staff evaluations should change with real community involvement such as that experienced by School D.

It appears that a particular atmosphere or mentality takes hold in a school and similarly affects all who come in frequent contact. Planned or forced community involvement maybe the quickest way (or the only way) to get Black parents and students to see what they have been missing, real community life. However, a few questions remain unanswered. Is the professional staff so totally dominating that their views are imported and accepted by Black students and parents? Is apathy on the part of some Blacks towards parental involvement an expression of hopelessness?

Overall, Black parents have expressed a strong desire for parental participation in school matters. Black students seem to be somewhat less

concerned about parental involvement. Teachers are mildly receptive to the idea. On the other hand, students, parents, and teachers in School D, community controlled, are very receptive to parental involvement.

APPENDIX

Appendix A

Questionnaire Items

Rank the following statements as to how important they are to you. If the statement or question is not very important, circle 0; if very important, circle 7, or somewhere in between for lesser amounts.

1. In a good junior high school, the curriculum should stress the teaching of:

	Circle One								
Reading	Not Very Important	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7 Very Important
Writing & Composition	"	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7 "
Spelling	"	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7 "
Mathematics	"	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7 "
Scinece	"	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7 "
Speech & Communication Skills	"	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7 "
History	"	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7 "
Geography	"	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7 "
Civics	"	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7 "
Woodshop	"	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7 "
Auto Mechanics	"	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7 "
Home Economics	"	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7 "
Typing & Shorthand	"	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7 "
Physical Education	"	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7 "
Art	"	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7 "
Music	"	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7 "

2. Parents should or must:

participate in school activities	Not Very Important	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7 Very Important
be involved with making school rules	"	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7 "
serve on school curriculum committees	"	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7 "
be involved with the selection of the principal	"	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7 "
approve their child's program of study	"	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7 "
give approval before the school can change their child's program	"	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7 "

be informed of all incidents involving their child	Not Very Important	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Very Important
assist in the evaluation of teachers	"	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	"
serve on student grievance committees	"	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	"
support the teaching staff	"	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	"
observe in the classroom when needed	"	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	"
assist in evaluating the school	"	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	"
assist in classroom activities when needed	"	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	"

FOOTNOTES

[1] The Fleischmann Report (Viking Press, 1973, Chapters 6 and 7, Volume II), A 3-year study of education in New York State dealt with the problem of what should be taught and recommended that: (1) reading and mathematics should receive strong emphasis (this emphasis should be enhanced through in-service training for teachers, along with revised teacher training programs); and (2) all students should be required to take only basic skills building courses from grades K-10. After grade ten a student would be given an opportunity to continue in an academic track or choose a vocational track. A student would have only one option through grade 10, academic track, and two options afterward, academic or vocational. From this survey most students, parents, and teachers would agree with the Fleischmann Commission recommendations.

[2] The Fleischmann Commission also took a look at community control and recommended that: the school principal should be the focus of accountability and therefore, the community (through an advisory board) should participate fully in the selection of the principal. It did not view teacher evaluation by parents as a viable mechanism for performance accountability. This study seems to agree somewhat with the Fleischmann recommendations, except, participants would evaluate the total school instead of concentrating on the principalship.